

Turn Yourself Into A Digital Wizard

BY JIM CARROLL

With all the sophisticated digital camera devices on the market, as well as a wide selection of printing options and CD/DVD distribution, it's getting easier and easier to take your own professional-looking photos to help sell or showcase your products.

Sure, your digital camera can take photos of shelf displays and end-caps for promotional material (both hardcopy brochures and for material on the Internet). But to make the most of your photos, you should be aware of sophisticated image editing and desktop publishing software that can be used with your digital camera.

Printing

Many people are mistaken that they have to print their own photos. If you do buy your own colour or photo printer, you may end up spending a lot of money on ink and paper. Not to mention, there is also some ongoing debate as to whether self-printed photographs have the same lasting power as regular photofinishing.

Why not try an online photofinisher instead? Companies like Japan Camera and MotoPhoto offer downloadable programs that you can install on your PC or Macintosh. Once you do that, you simply browse through your list of photos, choose which ones you'd

So you've mastered taking digital photos, but are you savvy when it comes to what you do with the photos afterwards?

like to be printed, provide your address and credit card information, and your photos will be delivered to you at home (for a fee), or you can arrange to pick them up at a photo depot.

Other companies such as Loblaw's, Future Shop, Blacks Photography and independent photo shops also offer similar services. One word of warning: the price of a digital print can vary substantially, so do your homework first – and shop around.

You can add captions and text, change the brightness or contrast of the image, or do any other number of things. Other, similar tools include iPhoto for the Macintosh, or Ulead PhotoExplorer and ACDSee for Windows systems. All are straightforward and easy to use. All of these programs also include "Internet wizards" that let you easily build a series of Web pages, containing your photos.

All of the above mentioned programs also provide slide show capabilities – simply choose which photos you'd like to show, choose their order (i.e. random or not) and you're in business. To make things even more straightforward, Microsoft has taken things further, building a slide show capability directly into Windows Explorer. Simply open the folder containing your pictures, choose the Slide Show option, and away you go.

Imagine the implications this feature can have for your next trade show booth. Picture a constantly evolving series of photos highlighting your product from a variety of different perspectives.

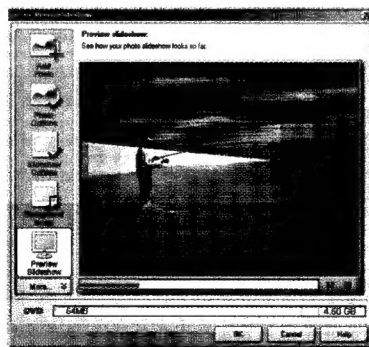
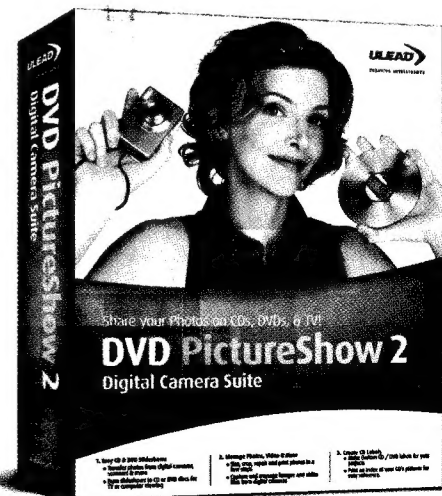


Photo manipulation and slideshows

With the increasing popularity of digital cameras, there has been a rise in consumer-friendly tools to manipulate and view your photos.

ThumbsPlus, which runs on a Windows-based system, allows for resizing photos, adjusting the quality and sizing so that photos can be used on a website or sent via email.



DVD/CD distribution

Creating a digital catalogue of key products that you'd like to distribute to your clients is inexpensive, and easy to do. Recipients can view your catalogue from the CD Drive on their PC, or even better, in their home DVD player.

A number of programs have come to market which let you create a professional-looking CD or DVD, complete with background music, menus, special effects and a multitude of other features.

Video-CDs, also known as VCDs, let you place an entire hour of video on a standard CD-ROM. The important thing is that a VCD can be placed in almost any DVD player. With DVD players being the most rapidly adopted consumer technology ever, this means you can distribute about an hour of video for the cost of a regular CD. To learn

more about VCDs, visit www.VCDHelp.com.

For a great example of a program that lets you create VCDs or even DVDs (if you have a burner), check out ULead DVD PictureShow 2. With this program, you can arrange your photos in a professionally organized slide show, add background music, navigation menus and buttons, and other features. All in all, it's a very effective way of distributing your pictures – and your message.

Use your imagination

I have been shooting digital pictures for over seven years, and have thousands and thousands of shots. Recently, at a family gathering, I set up the PC in the kitchen (my home is rather wired) to run a continuous slide show, showing pictures at random from that seven-year period. It was fascinating, to

say the least, to see how much time my in-laws and cousins, not to mention my family, spent in front of the screen.

Think about the implications this sort of set-up can have in a sales environment. If you are running a trade show booth, imagine running a screen show that contains a constant, random series of shots. Take shots of visitors, and work them into the slide show. It becomes that much more fun when you include candid photos of people in action, and not just product shots.

On a promotional marketing level, you can take a photo of an important sales contact – and then send them their photo on a coffee mug or a t-shirt that you can order online. There's something about a photo that captures the human eye, and if there is a way to use this reality to grab attention, go for it. **C**



◀ Canon PowerShot G3:

This high-end, 4 megapixel camera can take pictures suitable for an 11 x 14 print. It can support additional lenses (i.e. wide angle and telephoto), which is a rather unique feature since most other digitals don't support additional lenses. This camera also supports a USB connection to a computer, which dramatically increases the rate of transfer of pictures from the camera to your computer.

How mainstream have digital cameras become?

According to the Canadian Imaging Trade Association, the number of digital cameras sold in 2002 doubled compared to 2001 when some 434,000 were sold. And that itself was an increase of 85% over the year 2000. At the same time, the sales of conventional film cameras declined to about 75% of what they were before.

But are digital cameras suitable for use in professional art departments or for commercial use? An increasing number of professional photographers think so. One survey undertaken by Kodak showed that 3 out of 5 professional photographers found that digital photography was creating new opportunities for them that didn't exist before.

Until recently, most photographers never imagined they'd ever go digital and they worried they would not get the same quality as a good, old-fashioned professional camera. But nowadays, (particularly with releases such as Canon's new 11-megapixel camera), many professional photographers are firmly engrossed in the digital camp.